

Sacred Heart Church



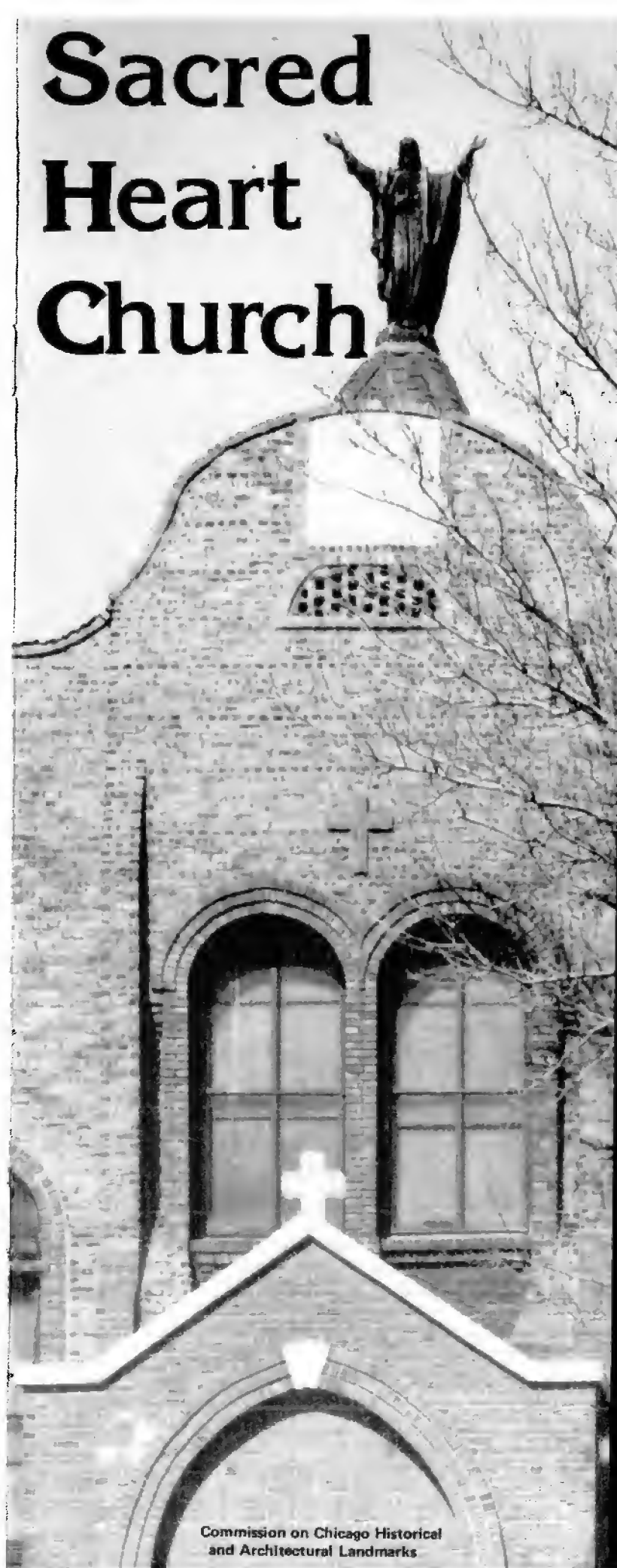
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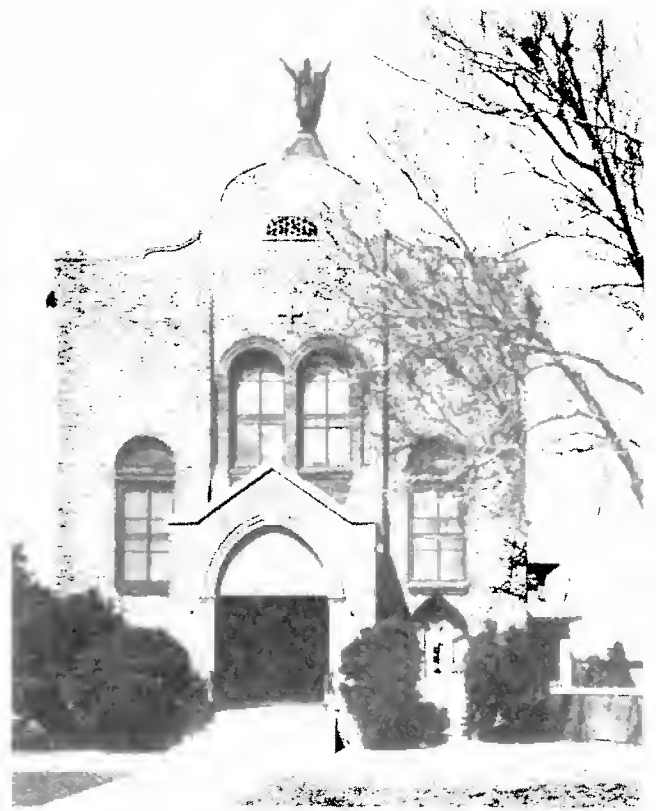
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Commission on Chicago Historical
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Sacred Heart Church
(Bob Thall, photographer)

SACRED HEART CHURCH
 11652 South Church Street
 Date of Construction: 1904

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The modest brick structure at 116th and Church streets that formerly housed Sacred Heart Church stands as a symbol of the history of the French people in Chicago. Founded in 1892 in Alsip, Illinois, Sacred Heart Church was the last French mission church established in the United States. The present structure was built in Morgan Park in 1904 to serve the French and French-Canadians who were employed in the nearby Purington Brickyard. The history of the French in the United States spans several hundred years, and this small brick building is a striking reminder of the later part of that history.

During the latter part of the seventeenth century, the French colonial influence in America was at its peak. France's colonial empire, called New France, extended from the Appalachians west to the Rocky Mountains and from New Orleans north to Hudson Bay in Canada. The French claimed this territory because much of it had been initially explored by French fur traders and missionaries. Fur pelts were a major source of income in New France. The French Catholic missionaries frequently traveled with fur traders and explorers to minister to their spiritual needs and also to convert the Indians. Trade and religion were thus the chief motives for the French to acquire as much territory as possible, and in 1671 they took possession of all the area around the Great Lakes.

The first French mission church in the Northwest was founded in 1665 at Chequamegon Bay, in what later became Wisconsin, by Father Claude Allouez. He later founded most of the principal missions in the Wisconsin area. These mission churches served as outposts of western civilization for French explorers and traders, French-Canadians and half-breeds, soldiers at French forts, and the Indians. The French missionaries who served in the Northwest were primarily Jesuits, but there were also Recollets, who were part of the Franciscan order, and at a later date Oblats, members of an order founded in France in 1816.

Father Jacques Marquette was born on June 1, 1637, in France. He was ordained into the Jesuit priesthood. In 1666, he arrived in Quebec, New France, to serve as a missionary. He built a mission at Sault Ste. Marie, which is at the falls where Lake Superior and Lake Huron meet. He later served the Jesuit missions at Chequamegon Bay on Lake Superior and at St. Ignace near the Straits of Mackinac.

In 1673, Marquette joined Louis Jolliet's expedition to explore the Mississippi River. Jolliet's goal was to see if the Mississippi River emptied into the Gulf of California which would make it a passageway to China. Marquette's job on this expedition was to preach to the Illinois Indians, considered a friendly tribe. After journeying several hundred miles down the Mississippi to its junction with the Arkansas, they concluded that the Mississippi emptied into the Gulf of Mexico and not into the Gulf of California. On the journey back they changed their route and canoed the Mississippi to the Illinois River and traveled into the Desplaines and to the south branch of the Chicago River. They then entered Lake Michigan and traveled north to Green Bay. After reaching Green Bay and the mission of St. Francis Xavier, Jolliet went on to Canada. Marquette was determined to return to Illinois and convert the Kaskaskia Indians who inhabited the present site of Utica, Illinois, and whom he had encountered on his journey with Jolliet. Because of his ill health he was forced to remain in Green Bay until October of 1674.

On October 26, 1674, Father Marquette, accompanied by two French voyageurs, Pierre Porteret and Jacques Argilier, left Green Bay to explore the Illinois country and convert the Kaskaskia Indians. Marquette and his companions were joined by a group of Pottawattomi and Illinois Indians who were also heading for the Illinois country. The group arrived at the mouth of the Chicago

River on December 4, 1674. Marquette and his two French companions were the first Europeans to visit the area. Because of the severe weather and his ill health, Father Marquette and his party remained in Chicago until March of 1675. During his stay Marquette said Mass every day. These were the first Christian religious services held in the area that later became Chicago.

Marquette left Chicago to resume his journey to the Kaskaskia Indian village in southern Illinois. After Marquette founded the Mission of the Immaculate Conception for the Indians, his health worsened and the group left the mission for St. Ignace, Michigan. Marquette died before the journey was completed and was buried near Ludington, Michigan. His body was later moved to St. Ignace, Michigan, where it is now buried.

In 1696, Jesuit Father Francois Pinet opened Angel Guardian Mission, the first organized place of worship in the Chicago wilderness. The mission was located in what is now Grant Park between Randolph Street and Jackson Boulevard. Situated on a route frequently taken by missionaries from Canada as they made their way south, the mission became a major stopping place. Father St. Cosme, who visited the mission in October of 1698, described it as a house "built on the bank of a small river with the lake on one side and a fine and vast prairie on the other." In 1700, the mission was closed by Count Frontenac, the Governor of Canada, because of his mistrust of the Jesuits.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the French found that passage by way of Green Bay and Chicago had become very dangerous because of hostile Indians. Trade began to shift southward and Chicago was no longer an important stopping place for the French-Canadians. The site of Chicago remained uninhabited until Jean Baptiste Point Du Sable built his home at the end of the Revolutionary War.

Brick buttresses separate the windows on the south side of the church.

(Bob Thall, photographer)





In 1902, parishioners enclosed the church with bricks made in the nearby Purington Brickyard, which altered the style of the building. The arched windows and large curved gable over the entrance are reminiscent of the Mission style of architecture.
(Bob Thall, photographer)

The Early Catholic Church in Chicago

In June of 1833, Chicago was incorporated as a town. At that time there were 130 Catholics in and around Chicago with the majority being pure French or of French and Indian extraction. During the 1830s, Chicago Catholics were under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Diocese of St. Louis. In 1833, a petition was sent to the Bishop of St. Louis for a resident pastor. The petition brought the arrival of French-born Father John M. I. St. Cyr on May 1, 1833.

Four months after the arrival of Father St. Cyr, work began on a church to be called St. Mary's. Located at State and Lake streets, the church cost \$400 to build and was a small frame building measuring 25 by 25 feet. Augustine Dodat Taylor, an architect and builder, constructed the church with the help of his brother Anson. St. Mary's was important architecturally because it was the first structure to employ balloon-frame construction. Taylor is credited with inventing this construction method, which employs light-weight joists and beams joined by machine-made nails.

Because it was so much easier to construct a balloon frame than a traditional New England frame, which used heavy timber joined by mortise-and-tenon joints, the new construction method quickly revolutionized the art of building. St. Mary's was finished in less than a month and the first Mass was held there in October, 1833.

In 1837, despite the protests of his congregation, Father St. Cyr was recalled by the Diocese of St. Louis and sent to the Mission of Quincy. During his years in Chicago, the number of Catholics in the Chicago area had grown to over 2,000.

By 1835, the membership of St. Mary's was 400. Irish, French, and Germans made up the congregation. From 1837 to 1847, the Roman Catholic Church was the largest of the several religions in the city. Pope Gregory XVI created the Diocese of Chicago, which included all of Illinois, on September 30, 1843. He appointed Father William J. Quarter, who was originally from Ireland, as the bishop. Construction had already begun on a new St. Mary's Church, which became the first cathedral in the new Diocese of Chicago. It was built of brick and was located at the

southwest corner of Wabash Avenue and Madison Street.

In 1846, Bishop Quarter established three new churches in Chicago: Augustine Taylor was the architect and builder of all three. St. Patrick's, located at Desplaines and Randolph streets, served Irish immigrants. (In 1856, a new St. Patrick's was built four blocks to the south to take the place of the original building. Carter and Bauer was the architectural firm commissioned for this second building which is still standing at Desplaines and Adams streets. St. Patrick's, the oldest Catholic church in Chicago, is also the oldest surviving church building within the city.) St. Peter's, located on Washington Street between Wells and Franklin streets, served German immigrants. St. Joseph's, located at the corner of Chicago Avenue and Cass Street (now Wabash Avenue) also served a German community. (Both St. Peter's and St. Joseph's were later demolished.) By the end of 1847, upon completion of these three additional churches, the Catholic Church had a strong foundation in Chicago.

In 1848, the French were sent their own priest, Father Lebel. Two years later, St. Louis Church was built for them at Clark Street between Jackson and Adams. It was re-located eight years later to Polk and Sherman where it stood until it was destroyed by the Chicago Fire of 1871. The church was never rebuilt.

In 1864, a second French community on the Near South Side established its own parish and built Notre Dame Church at Halsted and Congress. This parish, along with the earlier St. Louis parish, ministered to the needs of Chicago's French. In 1886, the French on the Far South Side organized St. Ambrose Parish at 16 East 177th Street. The name was changed to St. Louis de France in 1889. Another French community located in the Brighton Park area

The church is located on a tree-lined street which was named Church Street in honor of Sacred Heart.

(Bob Thall, photographer)



founded St. Joseph and St. Anne parish in 1889. The National Shrine of St. Anne is located here and is still a center of French religious life in the United States.

The Morgan Park Community and Sacred Heart Church

The land which is today the Morgan Park community contains a geographical feature known as the Blue Island Ridge. It is located about fifteen miles south of the center of Chicago. At the end of the last glacial period the ridge was actually an island in the large body of water that covered this area. Lake Michigan is the remnant of that body of water. When the waters receded they left a ridge surrounded by swamp land. Indians who hunted in the area blazed their trails on the higher grounds along the ridge. The Vincennes Trail, one of the original Indian trails, continued to be the main thoroughfare between Chicago and the Wabash Valley in western Indiana. It later became a major roadway which played an important role in Chicago's development.

Indians occupied the land south of what is now Chicago until 1833, when they signed away their rights to the land to the U.S. government. By 1835, the government had moved the Indians out of the region. In 1839, John Blackstone purchased what later became the Morgan Park section of the ridge from the U.S. government. Thomas Morgan in 1844 purchased from Blackstone several thousand acres of land on the ridge between 91st and 111th streets. Other settlers were farmers who hauled their produce to Chicago for sale. At this time the settlement was considered part of the Village of Blue Island and was known as North Blue Island.

In August of 1868, F.H. Winston purchased Thomas Morgan's land from his heirs. He then conveyed the land to the Blue Island Building and Land Company, which was incorporated in 1869. The company platted a subdivision, Washington Heights, which ran between Western and Ashland avenues from 107th Street to Lyon Avenue. Winding streets and parks in the subdivision were reminiscent of an old English park. Morgan Park was the name given to the southern part of the Washington Heights subdivision.

During the 1870s the population of the area increased, and many new streets were laid out. Establishment of several educational institutions in the community as well as the development of two major railroad lines brought many Chicago business and professional people to this residential suburb. Morgan Park was incorporated as an independent village in 1882 and was annexed to the City of Chicago in 1914.

In the 1880s the Purington Brickyard was established at 119th and Vincennes. Purington bricks have been used in the construction of residential and commercial buildings since that time. (The company is now called the Illinois Brick Company.) The brickyard provided jobs for many of the French-Canadians who eventually settled in the area. By 1892, many of these French-Canadians had settled nearby in Alsip, Illinois. Alsip was the first site of Sacred Heart Church, which was built on land at 123rd and Rexford, donated by William H. Harrison and his wife to the Catholic Bishop of Chicago. It served the eighteen

French Catholic families who had settled in the area. A priest traveled on the Interurban, an electric train line serving Chicago and the nearby area, to 119th and Vincennes and from there was taken to church by horse and buggy. The church accommodated not only the spiritual needs of the parishioners but also taught them social skills and English to help them function in American society. After a fire destroyed the church, Mass was temporarily said in Liberty Hall on the Purington Brickyard property. The present church, located in Morgan Park, was built in 1904. It was originally a small balloon-frame structure built on wooden posts in a swampy area. The facade was Greek revival in style with a small portico supported by two columns and topped by a pedimented gable. The building was sheathed in white clapboards. As streets were laid out, the lane in front of the church was named Church Street. Sacred Heart was established as a national church which meant that it was to serve a particular nationality, in this case, the French. An article from the December 17, 1904, Chicago Catholic newspaper, *The New World*, described the ceremony:

On Sunday afternoon at 4:00 the Canadians of Morgan Park witnessed an imposing ceremony at the blessing of Sacred Heart Church.

Reverend L. Broens addressed himself to the people in French and told them that their duty was to live in the new parish not only under the name of Catholics but also as true and faithful Canadians.

In 1922, the original building was enclosed within a larger brick structure. No major changes were made to the interior or to the basic proportions of the exterior. The larger brick structure was built by the parishioners with bricks from the Purington Brickyard. It is a simple structure reminiscent of the Mission style of architecture. The front facade is smooth common brick. Its broad expanse is punctuated by four round-arched windows. The other two windows flank the porch. A curvilinear gable tops the facade and conceals the main pitched roof behind it. A tall pyramidal roof just behind the gable is topped by a statue of Christ with arms outstretched.

Until the 1940s many pilgrimages were held at Sacred Heart. After that, fewer occurred, and the church came to resemble a neighborhood parish. On January 21, 1979, the church was closed by the Archbishop of Chicago.

Sacred Heart played an important role in the acculturation of the French in Chicago and serves as a reminder of their early history in this city.

The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from those qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. As part of this study, the Commission's staff prepares detailed documentation on each potential landmark. This public information brochure is a synopsis of various research materials compiled as part of the designation procedure.